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SUBJECT: CHINESE DCM ON DPRK DEVELOPMENTS

REF: SEOUL 1421

Classified By: POL M/C James L. Wayman. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

1. (C) Summary: Chinese Embassy DCM Xing Haiming, one of the PRC's most experienced DPRK-watchers, told DCM Tokola that the PRC hoped for a quick, positive decision by Washington on bilateral talks with Pyongyang. An upside to holding discussions in North Korea, he said, was that the DPRK interlocutor could get guidance quickly from Kim Jong-il. According to Xing, enforcement of UNSCR 1874 would be key to getting the North back to the Six Party Talks. Xing downplayed the significance of a recent DPRK security force crackdown on unofficial markets. End summary.

Veteran PRC North Korea-Watcher

2. (C) During a September 24 introductory lunch for DCM Tokola, PRC DCM Xing Haiming said China hoped the United States would make a positive decision soon about bilateral discussions with North Korea. Such talks, he said, could happen in Beijing, Pyongyang, Washington, Geneva or even Seoul; the "main thing," he emphasized, was to "talk to the North Koreans." The advantage of having discussions in Pyongyang, Xing noted, was that the DPRK interlocutor could easily get instructions from Kim Jong-il. Xing speculated that it might even be possible to meet with Kim Jong-il if the discussions were held in Pyongyang.

Trying to Move a Mule

3. (C) DCM Xing, who was educated in North Korea and is considered the dean of the PRC Foreign Ministry's DPRK-watchers, emphasized that getting Pyongyang back to the Six Party Talks (6PT) would not be easy. In any bilateral interaction with the United States, the North Koreans, he cautioned, would be guided by two common DPRK slogans: "better to die than surrender to the enemy" and "the benefit to us is the number one concern."

4. (C) Hailing Sino-American cooperation in the United Nations Security Council, Xing asserted that well-coordinated enforcement of UNSCR 1874 would be the key to getting the North back to the 6PT. Likening North Korea to a mule, Xing said 1874 was needed to "push them from the rear" while bilateral talks with the United States would serve to "pull them from the front." In the end, he predicted, the DPRK would return to the bargaining table; North Korea could not be allowed to retain possession of nuclear weapons, Xing stressed.

15. (C) Reviewing recent developments inside the DPRK, Xing downplayed the significance of the recent security force destruction of a major unofficial market near Pyongyang. Xing said such markets were now a fixture of daily life in North Korean society and were subject to periodic shakedowns.

In a typical urban area, he said, "out of ten markets, five may get shut down for a while. But that still leaves five operating." Xing acknowledged that the market closings no doubt created some ill will among the populace, but, in contrast to what we have heard from the North Korean refugee community (reftel), Xing said "it doesn't really matter if ordinary people are upset because Kim Jong-il and the security forces" remain in "absolute control."

STEPHENS